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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION AND OF APARTHEID, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Written statement submitted by Habitat International Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[26 July 1991]

1. We refer to an earlier written submission, document E/CN.4/1991/NGO/34 dated 12 February 1991, which sought to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to the widespread phenomenon of evictions across the world. The present submission seeks to substantiate the arguments put forward earlier by relating cases of evictions that have occurred recently and information on evictions that are planned during the course of 1991. This submission is organized on the basis of some of the rationales that continue to be used by Governments to justify the forced removal of persons from their homes in complete violation of their human right to housing.

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Evictions to "clean the urban environment"

2. On 18 June 1991 it was reported that 2,000 slum-dwellers were to be evicted and their homes destroyed in Bangkok, prior to the convening of an IMF and World Bank meeting to be held in the Thai capital in October 1991. 1/ The authorities responsible for the eviction of the slum-dwellers' homes, located near a new convention centre where the largest-ever meeting of this sort to be held in Bangkok will take place, have justified the eviction on the grounds that the delegates to the meeting should have "good scenery", as well as the aim of creating a "good environment". Officials have also claimed that the slum would be "a good hiding place for terrorists". Earlier attempts to "hide" the slums by placing a high wall around them have apparently proved ineffective. The "Human Rights in Thailand Report" states that "Thailand (is) among the countries with the most violent methods to clear away slums. For years slum people across Bangkok have faced demolition of their dwellings by the authorities, threats from gangsters and even arson, apart from normal legal procedures of eviction". 2/

3. As the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, set for mid-1992, draws closer, the authorities, seeking to present a clean and beautiful city to the international delegates, have embarked on a series of campaigns aimed at "cleansing" the city of homeless children who call the streets home. Over 4,500 street children have been murdered during the past three years.

4. In preparation for the celebrations surrounding the 500th anniversary of the landing by Columbus in 1492, over 15,000 families (at least 100,000 persons) have been forcibly removed from their homes in the cities of Santo Domingo and Santiago, in the Dominican Republic. 3/

5. In December 1990, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights declared the Dominican Republic to be in contravention of article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights because of its eviction programme (see the Committee's report on its fifth session, document E/1991/23-E/C.12/1990/8).

Evictions for "urban redevelopment"

6. During the course of 1991, in Madras, India, 118 different slums are to be removed from "private" lands. This would involve the demolition of 14,542 homes affecting a population of 103,742 persons. 4/

7. During November and December 1990, over 44,000 people were forcibly removed from their homes which were subsequently demolished in the Nairobi areas of Kibagare, Kwambiu Village, Kaptagat Road, Kileshwa and Gigiri. In addition, 1,431 business premises were demolished during this period, resulting in job losses for approximately 4,200 persons. On 18 May 1990, more than 2,000 people were violently evicted from the squatter settlement Muoroto, also in Nairobi. During the ensuing violence, seven people were killed and dozens injured. Women and children were beaten by policemen while bulldozers razed the settlement to the ground. 5/ Nairobi is the location of the

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), which made no comments during the course of these evictions and has consistently refused to take a stand on this global process.

Evictions due to "overcrowding"

8. On 23 May 1991 it was reported that the authorities in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, had the intention to forcibly remove 150,000 persons from the city of four million, in an alleged effort to relieve overcrowding. 6/

9. Over 800,000 Sudanese internal refugees living on the periphery of Khartoum are to be sent back to their places of origin and evicted from their settlements. 7/ International aid agencies working in the city have consistently expressed their opposition to the plan.

Evictions justified due to "land being below sea level"

10. Following heavy rains in the Maroko district of Lagos, Nigeria, the Government issued an eviction order on 6 July 1990, resulting one week later, on 14 July, in the forcible eviction of over 300,000 persons. The community of Maroko had existed since 1958. Since this massive eviction, only insufficient arrangements have been made for relocation or compensation. Most victims of the eviction remain essentially homeless. Legal attempts at preventing this eviction were unsuccessful. 8/ One year following this removal, the evicted land remains empty and unutilized.

11. During 1990 there were at least three armed actions on the part of the Panamanian armed forces and the United States army to dislodge families from their homes. Between January and March 1990, a total of 1,100 families were forcibly evicted. 9/ During the United States invasion of Panama in December 1989 thousands of Panama's poorest citizens were displaced from their homes as a result of bombing and subsequent bulldozing. 10/

12. Although precise numbers are difficult to obtain, it is widely accepted that many thousands of people were effectively evicted by bombs dropped by United States planes over Iraq during the Gulf War, which destroyed an equal number of civilian homes.

Evictions and international events

13. Large-scale evictions almost invariably precede major international events. Such was the case in New Delhi, India, prior to the Asian Games 1982; in Vancouver, Canada, for the Expo 86; in Seoul, South Korea, for the 1988 Summer Olympics; in Beijing, China, for the Asian Games 1990 as well as the examples of Bangkok and Rio de Janeiro mentioned above. For the 1988 Olympics alone 720,000 persons were forcibly evicted from their homes in Seoul. 11/ Attempting to hide the urban poor from foreign visitors cannot be considered a solution to homelessness and inappropriate housing policies.

Evictions through demolition

14. More than 300 persons in the Wabag Settlement in Lae, Papua New Guinea, were evicted from their homes on 15 May 1991, following the issuance of an eviction order by the Morobe Provincial Government. No alternative housing sites were provided, nor was any compensation paid. 12/

15. During early 1991 in the capital of occupied Tibet the Chinese authorities bulldozed and dug up the barkhor area, one of the holiest of Buddhist sites. In Lhasa the Tibetan quarter, which prior to the 1949 invasion constituted the entire city, has been systematically reduced by the Chinese to a mere 2 per cent of the city. 13/

16. These examples of recent and impending evictions are the few that have come to our notice and are representative of a much wider and insidious process which is destroying the lives and identities of millions of people around the world. They represent clear and continuing violations of the internationally recognized rights to adequate housing, to freedom of movement, to privacy and to the right to choose one's residence. Habitat International Coalition urges the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to act urgently to encourage States to halt this practice of violating one of the most basic of human rights.

Notes

1/ BBC World Service, 18 June 1991, 13.00 GMT.

2/ "Human Rights in Thailand Report", vol. 13, No. 1-2, January-June 1989.

3/ See: Somocurcio and Florian Borbon, "El Proceso de Reordenamiento Urbano y los Desalojos en Santo Domingo", 1989 and COPADEBA, "Remodelacion Urbana y Desalojos en Santo Domingo", 1990.

4/ See: Statement released by Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB), March 1991 in Madras, India.

5/ See: Weekly Review, 1 June 1990, published in Kenya.

6/ BBC World Service, 23 May 1991, 16.00 GMT.

7/ NRC Handelsblad, 22 April 1991.

8/ See: "Gone: Maroko Slum Crushed", Sunday Concord, 15 July 1990; "Marok Evacuation: Landlords Count Losses", Guardian Express, 18 July 1990; "Maroko: Legal Bids Fail to Stop Demolition", The Guardian, 14 July 1990; "Pluie d'expulsions sur Lagos", ENDA, July 1990.

9/ CODEHUCA and CONADEHUPA, "Panama Delegations Report", No. 2, 16 April 1990.

10/ See: BRECHA: Monthly publication of the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America (CODEHUCA), January-February 1990, No. 6 and "Invasion Impact Lingers in Panama Slum", International Herald Tribune, 4-5 August 1990.

11/ See: Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Urban Poor and Housing Rights in South Korea and Hong Kong (Fact-Finding and Assessment Mission to South Korea and Hong Kong), 7-18 September 1990; Disposable People: Forced Evictions in South Korea (Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1988).

12/ "Settlers Watch as Bulldozer Flattens Homes", Post Courier, 16 May 1991; "Lae Forced Evictions Upset Shelter Group", Post Courier, 10 May 1991.

13/ See: Tibet Information Network, "Reconstruction in the Old City of Lhasa", 10 November 1990.